

SHIFTING SANDS MAZE

The Shifting Sands Maze is a breathtaking, yet perilous expanse of ochre dunes and towering sandstone formations. Whispers carry on the wind of ancient power, and the very ground seems to breathe as pathways rearrange themselves in a ceaseless, unpredictable dance orchestrated by awakened earth spirits.

ADVENTURE HOOKS & RUMORS

- A Sandsstrider elder claims the recent storms are a sign of the spirits' displeasure, and a forgotten ritual must be performed to restore balance – but the ritual requires a component only found in the heart of the most treacherous, constantly shifting section of the maze.
- Rumors speak of outsiders who have learned to predict the sandstorms, using the chaos to their advantage and disrupting the Sandsstriders' efforts to appease the earth spirits. Some say they seek to exploit the maze's power for their own gain.
- A desperate Sandsstrider has offered a substantial reward for anyone who can locate a lost artifact – a stone tablet said to contain the key to calming the earth spirits and permanently stabilizing the maze's pathways.

LOCATIONS

1. The Sunken Threshold

The entrance to the Shifting Sands Maze is marked by a crumbling archway half buried in ochre sand. A perpetual, low frequency hum emanates from within, vibrating through the ground and unsettling those who approach. Fine, abrasive particles constantly swirl in the air, stinging exposed skin and obscuring vision. The sand here is unusually dense, making each step a struggle and threatening to swallow unwary travelers.

2. The Whispering Dunes

Towering dunes conceal illusory paths, testing perception and trust.

3. The Sunken Oasis

A hidden pool offers respite, but the water is guarded by animated sandstone constructs.

4. The Echoing Galleries

Vast chambers amplify sounds, revealing hidden passages through sonic resonance.

5. The Spirit's Core

Deep within the maze, the pathways converge upon a vast, open chamber dominated by a towering sandstone monolith. The Sandstriders, adorned in earth toned robes, perform a ritualistic dance around the monolith, chanting to appease the awakened earth spirits. Their faces are etched with a mixture of reverence and desperation. The air crackles with energy, and the ground trembles as the spirits' power manifests, causing the pathways to shift violently.

ENCOUNTERS

Name	Details
Sandstrider Patrol	A group of heavily armed Sandstriders actively hunt outsiders, viewing them as threats.
Animated Sand Golem	A large golem formed from the maze's sands attacks, protecting a crucial pathway.
Shifting Mirage	A powerful sandstorm obscures the path, disorienting travelers and damaging equipment.
Ritualistic Guardians	Sandstrider warriors defend the Spirit's Core, attacking anyone who approaches.

TREASURE

- **Amulet of Steadfastness:** Grants resistance to sandstorm damage, but induces unsettling dreams.
- **Scroll of Shifting Paths:** Reveals temporary stable pathways, but fades quickly, requiring careful timing.
- **Sandstone Focus:** Amplifies earth based magic, but risks attracting the attention of the awakened spirits.

NPCS

- **Zara:** A Sandstrider Elder, fiercely protective of the maze's balance.
- **Kaelen:** A wandering scholar, knowledgeable about ancient earth spirits and willing to help.
- **Rexus:** A disgruntled Sandstrider outcast, seeking to disrupt the ritual and free those trapped.

PLOT RESOLUTIONS

- The adventurers could choose to assist Zara, the Sandstrider elder, in performing the forgotten ritual, requiring them to brave the most treacherous sections of the maze to find a rare earth crystal. Successfully completing the ritual would permanently stabilize the maze, but it would also bind the earth spirits to the Sandstriders' will, potentially restricting outsiders' ability to freely explore the region.
- The PCs might decide to align themselves with Kaelen, the wandering scholar, who believes the Sandstriders' ritual is flawed and seeks a different way to appease the spirits – perhaps by understanding their displeasure through ancient lore. This path could lead to a more peaceful resolution, but it risks incurring the wrath of Zara and the other Sandstriders who see their traditions as the only safeguard against chaos.
- The adventurers could attempt to aid Rexus, the disgraced Sandstrider outcast, in disrupting the ritual, believing it's causing unnecessary suffering and trapping people within the maze. Success might free those imprisoned, but it could unleash the full fury of the awakened earth spirits, leading to the complete collapse of the maze and widespread devastation.

